

A Real Novelty in Grand Opera

How a Native Japanese Prima Donna Gave a Convincing Heroine of Japan to the Stage in "Madame Butterfly"



Felice Lyne, the Coloratura Soprano of Mlle. Pavlowa's Opera Company.



Tamaki Miura, the Little Japanese Grand Opera Lyric Soprano Who Gives to the Stage a Genuine Native Opera Heroine.

SOMETHING really new in the production of grand opera occurs so seldom that its advent assumes the proportions of an event worthy of more than casual mention. Such a departure from the well-worn thoroughfare of opera performances in New York City recently gave keen pleasure to jaded patrons of that form of public entertainment, and, perhaps, justified a hope of further developments along similar lines.

Last season, and for several seasons past, "Madame Butterfly," an opera composed by Puccini with a libretto adapted from Belasco's play with the same title, was the most popular work in the repertory of the Metropolitan Opera Company. Like the play, this opera depends for its success mainly upon its seductive exotic scene and central character. It enacts the affecting love tragedy of a naive and trusting Japanese girl amid the surroundings and in the deftly suggested atmosphere of her native home.

In presenting the opera of "Madame Butterfly," however, the lyric soprano enacting the role of heroine has been one or another of several prima donne who bore not the faintest resemblance to a Japanese girl, nor seemed to have the remotest conception of the character and national traits of this engaging heroine of an international tragedy. They were Italian, French or American—hopelessly Occidental—opera singers, and that was all. Their interpretations cost the affecting story the chief element of the charm felt in the reading of John Luther Long's little masterpiece, namely, a visualization of the real Japanese Cio-Cio-San, its heroine and the opera's main justification for seeing the light of day.

Now, suddenly, this ponderous error is corrected, and by the simplest and most direct means. "Madame Butterfly" is lifted out of literary commonplace by a singer who is as Japanese as the heroine, Cio-Cio-San, herself—a capable opera lyric soprano born in Japan of Japanese parents and educated and trained in her art in Tokio.

Her name is Tamaki Miura, and her opera introduction to Western audiences stands to the credit of Mlle. Anna Pavlowa, the celebrated Russian danseuse. Straight from Tokio the Japanese opera songbird was taken first to London, where she appeared with the Imperial Russian Opera Company. When Mlle. Pavlowa took over the Boston Grand Opera Company, with Max Rabinoff as managing director, one of her first acts was to bring Ta-

Mlle. Anna Pavlowa, in the "Snowflake" Ballet, Which She Presents in Her Own Opera Company's Performance of "Madame Butterfly."

maki Miura to this country to be the heroine of "Madame Butterfly."

The result of the Japanese singer's first appearance in that character in New York, at the Manhattan Opera House, entirely justified Mlle. Pavlowa's perspicacity. To a certain extent it duplicated the effect of Oscar Hammerstein's initial presentation there of Tetrazzini, the exhilarating Italian coloratura soprano, when the fortunes of that new temple of grand opera were hanging in the balance. It seemed to place well on its legs the Russian dancer's rather risky enterprise.

The opera reviewers were unanimously cordial in their published reception of the indigenous Cio-Cio-San. The dean of the New York critical corps recorded that Tamaki Miura, in "Madame Butterfly," "took the house by storm." As subsequent audiences, successively larger and more representative of New York's opera-going public, manifested the same degree of enthusiasm, that reviewer's analysis of the Japanese singer's performance gained in significance.

"The enthusiasm was entirely justified, for not only is her performance authoritative, as no Occidental conception can be, but she is a fine actress, reminding one of her great countrywoman, Sada Yacco. As a climax to these qualifications for this role she has a voice of unusual beauty, power and fervor. Even the white, thin quality of the medium voice is an asset in this part, as Tamaki Miura San seems to be the child she is supposed to be. She is as gay and childlike, as full of laughter as any tiny Japanese maiden of fifteen would be, but there is also remarkable dignity and poise in her manner."

And when the time arrived for the dainty, trusting and tender little Japanese sweetheart to be confronted with the uncompromising American wife of her American naval officer lover, she accepted her fate like a true Oriental. Simply, and with fatalistic lack of hesitation, and in becoming retirement from the scene, she performed the private and personal last rite of hara-kiri.

The audiences at the Manhattan could not resist an appeal which seemed so true to our Western ideal of the Japanese feminine character. Here appeared the results of Tamaki Miura's stage training on Occidental lines. Instead of the effect of aloofness, and the stolid mummery of Oriental actors in Oriental dramas presented in the Oriental manner, she demonstrated possession of the magnetic quality, in stage phrase called "personality," which is regarded by actors of this country and of Europe as their chief asset—for it enables them to "get their work over the footlights," that is, to convince and hold the audience.

To some, however, it was sad that so fine and novel a performance should have been marred by lack of managerial judgment in casting the character of the hero's American wife. A man in Pinkerton's position, an officer in the United States

navy, would be expected to have a wife typical of the class of American women who are notoriously well bred and tastefully dressed. It seemed that neither poor little native Cio-Cio-San, nor the exigencies of the plot, hardly deserved the shock of that brutally assertive apparition in the "Grand Street" monstrosity, yeelp hat. The disillusioned little Oriental could have been trusted to save the tragedy with hara-kiri, anyway.

It will be of interest to every play—and opera—goer in this country to know that this Japanese prima donna not only sings Occidental music in the Occidental manner, but acquired that art in her own country—in Tokio—where opera is given as in Europe and America, and where music is taught and voices cultivated by the same methods used in New York, London, Paris, Dresden and Milan.

So there is no longer any excuse in grand opera for Broadway or Piccadilly interpretations of Japanese characters. Farther, the advent here of Tamaki Miura, with such distinct success to a favorite opera, shows that more is now expected of an opera impresario than the presentation of the most famous singers with the most famous and expensive voices. As in the case of the legitimate drama, the public

will expect the characters to be appropriately and faithfully interpreted. Japan is now added to the list of countries which produce capable singers who can act—in greater numbers than probably any impresario will admit. Which leaves them no excuse for going on presenting Japanese, Swedish, German, French, Russian, Eskimo and Zulu heroes and heroines in the Broadway-Piccadilly cabaret manner.

The Pavlowa-Rabinoff new opera organization—thus auspiciously started on its career—is full-fledged on up-to-date lines, presenting with capable artists most of the grand operas which have won favor in this country. The old opera composers nearly always engineered their scenes to include a ballet. Later the cut-and-dried, stiff-corsetted, fluffy-skirted aggregation of premiere and corymbes has gone out of fashion in presentations of grand opera. In Russia, however, the ballet is retained in the characteristic development demonstrated as a performance in itself in this country by Pavlowa and other dancing celebrities of that nation. Having acquired an opera organization of her own, Pavlowa puts the two together again—and thus adds advantages of her own special art and reputation to the fortunes of the Boston Grand Opera Company.

This feature—with the success of the real Japanese "Butterfly"—points to a possibility of another, though lesser, opera war in New York, with the Manhattan Opera House as its storm centre—as before. At present this prospect is somewhat remote owing to the fact that the Pavlowa-Rabinoff organization and the Japanese "Butterfly" are not yet a permanent New York institution. Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and other large cities come in for their attention, also, and they do not expect to appear in New York again until next Spring. It may be well, just the same, to bear in mind recent opera history in New York.

Ten years ago, when Oscar Hammerstein built the Manhattan Opera House and announced his purpose of becoming a grand opera impresario in New York City, everybody laughed—except those who wept over the anticipated total wreck of the Hammerstein fortunes. How could anybody expect anything but failure in a contest with the old, entrenched, socially fortified Metro-

politan Oper with its company of world-famous singers? The cost of Mr. Hammerstein's new home for grand opera alone was \$1,500,000. It had required Caruso, at \$2,500 a night, to spare the Metropolitan the pain of an annual deficit, in spite of the management's enormous subscription sales of seats and boxes. Where would Mr. Hammerstein find a Caruso, at any price? And, lacking any such means of drawing several thousand opera lovers past his box office at the Manhattan for at least two or three performances a week, how could he stand the strain of the enormous ordinary expenses of producing grand opera?

But Mr. Hammerstein had laid foundations for grand opera other than those of the Manhattan Opera House. First, he delighted New York operagoers with a fascinating revival of their favorite "Carmen." This lifted him safely over the first hurdles. Then he played his trump card. He astonished New York by presenting a highly efficient female foil to Caruso—Tetrazzini, who proved to be the most magnetic coloratura soprano ever heard in the Eastern metropolis.

Thereafter, how Mr. Hammerstein rattled the dedicated opera skeletons in the Metropolitan "property" room by ignoring the tried old work with which the metropolis had been surfeited for a generation and giving splendid productions of the great modern French operas—a revelation to American audiences—is familiar recent history.

The Metropolitan Opera organization, with all its wealth and social prestige, was so worried that it gave Mr. Hammerstein a million dollars in cold cash to go elsewhere and let the "Diamond Horseshoe" sleep in peace.

Is it the destiny of Mlle. Pavlowa and a native Japanese prima donna, weighing perhaps ninety pounds—against the two hundred odd of Tetrazzini—to again disturb those slumbers? Q. E. D.

Bedtime No Time for Candy

CANDY is a good thing. There would be a lot more hungry people in the world if it wasn't for candy. Even in favor of cheap candy there's a lot to be said.

Sugar, in whatever form, is a real food as well as an actual stimulant. But you ought not to eat it before going to bed.

The digestive organs work well during sleep as during wakefulness, though not as fast, but the salivary glands do not.

Accustomed to being stimulated

by the act of chewing, the juices that come into the mouth readily at that time, and often during the day, are apt to be dormant during sleep.

Candy, like all sugars, requires a great deal of the substances in the saliva to help it through its various transformations into alcohol, starches and then the various organic compounds that the body needs.

If we eat candy overnight we are very likely to have a "bad taste in the mouth" in the morning.